

Spear



Next Big Thing

FILIPINO CUISINE IN JACKSONVILLE COMES OF AGE

BY JEFFREY SPEAR

Cities throughout the United States and other countries derive their character, in part, from their colorful and distinctive ancestry groups. While many of them have centralized commercial districts bearing names such as Chinatown and Little Saigon, Jacksonville's ethnic communities tend to be scattered. While there is no recognized central neighborhood like a Little Italy, the River City boasts the largest concentration of Filipinos in the state of Florida and throughout the South.

While a small number of Asian grocers and nondescript takeout shops have offered Filipino specialties, primarily adobo (stew), pancit (noodles) and lumpia (spring rolls), the depth and variety of Filipino foods is somewhat lacking. The opening of **Jollibee** in 2017 (a Filipino fast-food chain that rivals McDonalds in popularity) was certainly a catalyst for change. When **The Baker's Son**, a prominent Filipino bakery, opened several years later, the demand for Filipino foods became obvious.

According to Agnes Lopez, Founder of Jax Filipino Chefs, "Filipino food has been called 'the next big thing' by culinary experts around the country. While Jollibee was the first to attract attention here in Jacksonville, a number of highly creative Filipino chefs have been planning, and are now opening,

restaurants that feature praiseworthy Filipino cuisine."

When you consider that the Philippines is just one of several Pacific rim countries, each with its own culinary culture, it becomes readily apparent that chefs in this region, over time, have shared recipes and ideas with their neighbors. A few dishes worth investigating, apart from the well-known pancit, lumpia and adobo, are silog (a class of dishes that includes meat, garlic fried rice and egg), kare kare (stew with a rich peanut sauce) and sisig (chopped pork with chicken livers in a spicy and sour sauce). When it comes to baked goods, the pillow-like breads called ensayadas, or a slice of sansrival (cake layered with buttercream, meringue and chopped cashews) should not be missed.

Recognizing that one of the most talked about ingredients in Filipino cuisine is ube, an intensely purple yam that brightens up desserts and sweet baked goods, make sure to try halo-halo (a shaved ice confection with ube), a slice of ube cheesecake or a scoop of ube ice cream drizzled with ube syrup. If you are curious, there are some wonderful Filipino bakeries, cafes and restaurants around town worth visiting. While their numbers are increasing, be sure to check out the breads, pastries, sweet treats and take-home specialties from



The Baker's Son, **SaySoSweets Filipino Cafe** and **Kúsina Good Eats**. If dining out is your preference, spend a little time enjoying the savory and sweet offerings at **Purple Roots** (pictured) or the recently opened **Abstrakt Filipino Essence**. ✨

DISCO FRIES. C'EST CHIC.

IN THE GLITZY, HIGH-OCTANE WORLD OF 70'S DISCO, LATE-NIGHT REVELERS LOOKING TO REFUEL AFTER A LONG NIGHT OF DANCING FOUND THE PERFECT DISH - DISCO FRIES. AFTER NEARLY 50 YEARS, THIS DISH, AND VARIATIONS ON THE THEME, ARE AS POPULAR AS EVER.



The history of Disco Fries is not altogether clear. They are most frequently attributed to the **Tick Tock Diner** in Clifton, New Jersey. Their recipe, a favorite among the polyester-clad disco crowd after a long night of drinking and dancing, consisted of crispy fries smothered with mozzarella cheese and drowned in brown gravy. While Disco Fries have enjoyed lasting popularity and can still be found on the Tick Tock menu today, Canadians will tell you the concept of fries smothered with cheese and sauce is nothing new.

In Canada, the dish is called Poutine. Consisting of fries and cheese curds covered with gravy, the similarity is undeniable. The history of Poutine pre-dates Disco Fries by more than 20 years, originating in rural Quebec sometime in the 50s. While Poutine has its advocates, some would say the recipe created by the Tick Tock Diner took a good idea and made it even better.

Having spent my disco years in Los Angeles, a place where burger stands and taquerias are the favorite after-hours destinations, I was introduced to the concept of Chili Fries. In the wee hours, nothing took the edge off a long night of heavy drinking and carousing better than a mountain of fries smothered in chili with a generous sprinkling of cheese and onions. In most cases, the chili was more of an indecipherable glop made with who-knows-what. At that hour, nobody asked questions. It was hot and satisfying and that's all that mattered.

While Disco Fries, Poutine and Chili Fries are still in demand today, innovative chefs around the country are making their mark on these time-honored recipes - finding new and delicious ways to smother and adorn a plate of perfectly prepared fries.

At the **Thai Diner** in New York's Nolita neighborhood, Chef Ann Redding has created her own version of Disco Fries. Starting with a foundation of crispy fries, she smothers them in a spicy massaman curry followed by a sprinkling of chopped red onions, peanuts and drizzled with coconut cream.

In Los Angeles, traditionally prepared Chili Fries can still be found at **Original Tommy's** and **Pink's**, both places I enjoyed on countless late-night adventures. While more creative and globally inspired versions such as Dirty Chili Fries (Chorizo Chili, Cheddar Sauce, Onion, Cilantro, Bacon Bits) at **Dirt Dog**, Carne Asada Fries (fries, melted cheese, house salsa, guacamole, chipotle aioli, cilantro avocado aioli, sour cream) at **Brick and Flour** and Spicy Joint Fries (Korean beef, kimchi, onions, cheese w/spicy aioli) at **Far East Joint** are becoming increasingly prevalent, I doubt they're available in the wee hours.

Right here in Jacksonville, **Mojo BBQ** offers their version of Disco Fries (hand-cut fries topped with jack and cheddar cheese and brisket debris gravy) while **Epik Burger** makes Big Fatty Fries (fries layered with bleu cheese and cheese sauce, more fries, gravy, 'nduja americana, sriracha aioli, sunny egg, chopped bacon, scallions and Howler Monkey hot sauce).

While there are naysayers who view these sorts of dishes as "a heart attack waiting to happen," Disco Fries, along with all of their more modern incarnations, remain my all-time favorites. If they're on the menu, that's what I'll be having.

Jeffrey Spear has been writing about food, creating culinary brands, developing recipes and producing cookbooks for more than 40 years. If you're looking to enhance the impact of your culinary brand, or simply need someone to tell your story in ways that are visually and emotionally appealing, give Jeff a call: 866 787 8761 - or shoot him an email: jeff@studiospear.com

CUSTOM CONTENT

WHERE CHEFS FIND INSPIRATION

Wild-caught Alaska seafood inspires an extraordinary class of chefs

CHEF SERIES 2022

Chefs looking to improve their offerings find inspiration from remarkable places. For these four world-class chefs, inspiration comes from the pristine waters of Alaska. In an ongoing video series, these innovators share their insights, tips and stories in four short, yet riveting videos. From family traditions to creative techniques, you'll hear how the exceptional flavor, texture and versatility of wild-caught Alaska seafood, frozen at its peak of freshness, along with the sustainable fishing practices employed by Alaskan fishermen, have provoked noteworthy creativity.



ANN KIM
Spicy Korean Fish Stew
(Maeuntang)

HEALTHY

DOMENICA CAPELLI
Alaska Seafood Cioppino



SUSTAINABLE



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DELICATE ALASKA SOLE BECOMES THE PERFECT COMPANION TO BOLD KOREAN FLAVORS

Minneapolis-based Ann Kim, chef/owner of Pizzeria Lola, Young Joni and Sooki & Mimi, grew up on the southern tip of Korea where seafood was prevalent. At family meals featuring whole fish, they'd fight over the eyeballs, considered a prized delicacy. Always seeking out the best ingredients, Kim appreciates the sustainability and integrity of wild-caught, frozen-fresh Alaska seafood, allowing her to present seafood in ways unfamiliar to most Americans. When it comes to wild-caught Alaska sole, she says "This fish is healthy and lean and has a great mild flavor that pairs well with simple ingredients. It holds up nicely in hearty dishes like my go-to Korean stew."

MARRYING A BOUNTY OF FRESH HERBS AND SPICES WITH A CORNUCOPIA OF ALASKA SEAFOOD

Domenica Catelli, Executive Chef at Catelli's in Geyserville, California has a thing for wild seafood from Alaska. In her Cioppino, she says "These seafoods are so clean and beautiful. They have a sweetness and texture that makes this dish wonderful." Frequently appearing at pop-up events, she likes to make fish cakes, salads featuring cured fish and rich seafood stocks that riff on Asian-influenced dishes such as pho and ramen, using any number of globally sourced spices to give her dishes added flavor and distinction.



GEORGE MENDES
Alaska Halibut
with Fricassee of
Spring Vegetables



AKSHAY BHARDWAJ
Tandoori Salmon



WILD



CHEF'S ARTISTRY AND TECHNIQUE SHINE A LIGHT ON THE PRISTINE FRESHNESS OF ALASKA HALIBUT

Born to Portuguese immigrants, George Mendes, chef and partner at Veranda, New York, grew up in a household where seafood was served three to four times a week, quickly becoming part of his culinary DNA. In 2009, he introduced Portuguese cuisine to diners in New York, earning a Michelin star and setting the stage for critical acclaim. For this dish Mendes says, "Wild-caught Alaska halibut is the star. It's a pristine and extremely fresh product. There's no need to mask its natural flavor. I like that it stands on its own. Even with other cuisines, as long as you don't overwhelm the fish, there are possibilities."

ALASKA SOCKEYE SALMON AND AGE-OLD COOKING TECHNIQUE FORM THE PERFECT UNION

Akshay Bhardwaj, Executive Chef at Junoon, New York was the first Indian chef to be selected for the Forbes "30 under 30: Food and Drink" list, creating experiences that rely on his South Indian heritage. When asked about his influences, Bhardwaj explains "Most Indian food is north Indian, a land-locked point of origin with little access to seafood. While Junoon is south Indian, a cuisine that emphasizes vegetarian dishes, there's lots of room for seafood." Mastery of the tandoor oven is also important, he continues "While tandoor ovens are affordable, the technique is hard to grasp. It's like the way sushi is mastered. It takes time."

WATCH THESE CHEFS IN ACTION

To see how each of these incredible dishes is prepared, and to learn more about the versatility of the world's best wild-caught seafood, watch all of these chef videos at [PlateOnline.com](https://www.plateonline.com).

Ethnic Cuisine

AN ENDLESS ADVENTURE

BY JEFFREY SPEAR





When describing the culinary culture in Jacksonville, a typical response would include smokehouse barbecue, fried chicken, biscuits and gravy, pimiento cheese, fried green tomatoes, hush puppies, and other such mainstays of southern cuisine. The reality is that, in a region with over 1.5 million residents, more than 40 percent coming from non-European backgrounds, the culinary culture in Northeast Florida also includes dishes with strange and mysterious names such as pad see ew, shumai, queue de boeuf, doro wot, bulgogi, Spam musubi, baba ghanouj, chicharron con arepa, zwiebel schnitzel, mutton keema biryani, kimchi jeyuk bokkeum, and papa a la Huancaína.

According to recent surveys, the largest ancestry groups in Jacksonville include German, English, and Italian. The city is also home to the tenth-largest Middle Eastern population in America which includes individuals from Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Israel, Jordan, and Palestine and has the largest concentration of Filipinos in all of Florida. There are also significant immigrant populations from North African countries including Ethiopia and Nigeria as well as Caribbean points of origin including Cuba, Haiti, and Jamaica. Additionally, we have locals hailing from Russia and Eastern European countries including Albania, Poland, Ukraine, and Hungary and others with southeast Asian origins including China, Japan, Vietnam, South Korea, Cambodia, and India.

With so many ethnic populations taking up residency across Jacksonville's 875 square miles, it's easy to understand why there are so many exotic restaurants in

our communities.

Of course, ethnic restaurants vary significantly in size, quality, and overall appeal. From food trucks and hole-in-the-wall operations that require little in the way of infrastructure or operating capital to considerably larger, fully designed, and aesthetically engaging venues that have relied upon serious investment to get their doors open, there are culinary experiences that will provoke the gamut of emotions—from intimidating and unimpressive to delightful and delectable.

While undeniably ethnic in origin, Italian, Mexican, and Japanese (sushi) cuisine have become long-standing culinary mainstays in American diets. In order to introduce foods that have not yet gained recognition or footholds in Jacksonville's culinary consciousness, these familiar cuisines have been purposefully omitted.

The cuisines featured are those typically patronized by the ethnic diaspora living and working in the region. They also require a sense of adventure and a willingness to take risks. If you crave excitement and are willing to overlook aesthetically challenged environments in pursuit of exciting ingredients, flavors, and preparations, you'll enjoy the places we've uncovered.

Starting at the smaller end of the food service spectrum, check out Jacksonville's food trucks. There are exceptionally talented chefs who embrace the food truck culture as a way of developing their craft. Aside from standards including burgers, BBQ, and pizza, many food truck chefs are producing authentic culinary delights from

This page, Beignet's Griot and 5th Element;
Opposite, Peony Asian Bistro's Peking Crispy Duck.



Argentina (Mama's Food), Venezuela (El Chamo Criollo), Germany (Wurstbusters), Hawaii (Big Island Bowls), and Peru (Rinconcito de Lima).

When it comes to brick-and-mortar operations, the variety is even greater. This being said, it helps to check out online reviews and prepare for the worst. Some of these places, in spite of abundant praise online, can be a little off-putting. Between run-down strip mall locations, dim lighting, questionable hygiene, unappealing aesthetics, and poorly maintained facilities, they do not have the same level of polish and sparkle of larger, better-staffed, and better-equipped enterprises.

The good news is that there are plenty of operators who understand what it means to run an appealing and sustainable ethnic restaurant and there are wonderful treasures to discover.

At the smaller-size end of the spectrum, Apna (Indian & Pakistani), Marianas Grinds (Pacific Islander), Hala's Mideast Eatery and Market (Middle Eastern) and Beignets Caribbean Cafe (Haitian) all represent opportunities for new and interesting culinary experiences.

Apna is a small collection of tables partitioned off from Apna Bazar—a grocery store featuring imported foods. Its menu features a variety of Indian dishes that includes samosas (puff pastries filled with beef, chicken, or vegetables), Chicken Tikka (charbroiled boneless tender chicken breast that's been marinated with yogurt and herbs), and curries including Lamb Vindaloo, Chicken Karahi, and Chicken Korma. The fact that it's linked to a market means you can dine and explore the aisles during the same visit.

Marianas Grinds prepares cuisines described as Pacific Islander—foods from Hawai'i, the Philippines, and the Mariana Islands. The most authentic dishes—those not to be missed—are Ginisan Katne (stir fry beef or chicken with bok choy, eggplant, and onions), Loco Moco (steamed rice topped with a homemade ground beef patty, a fried egg, and smothered in homemade brown gravy) and Teriyaki Chicken (boneless chicken thigh marinated in Grinds' special teriyaki sauce—different from Japanese teriyaki). For true adventurers, there's Spam musubi. This tasty Hawaiian appetizer is a creative combination of Spam and rice and is surprisingly popular.

Hala's is part restaurant, part imported food grocery store, and part bakery (yes, they operate a commercial bakery, making their own pita breads on the premises). It is important to mention that Hala's is one of the better-presented and more satisfying among the smaller restaurants we visited. Operated today by Ansar Owais and his family, Hala's was originally opened in 1974 by his Jordanian grandfather (an early day foodie who recognized increasing demand for foodstuffs from Mideast countries).

Hala's hummus (a blended chickpea and tahini dip served with house-baked pita bread), Lamb Shawarma (served as a pita wrap or pocket rider made with seasoned, sliced lamb, tomatoes, onion, house-made Arabic pickles, parsley, and tahini sauce), and M'sakhan (a house specialty—roast chicken with onion and sumac served on flatbread) are not to be missed. For newcomers, the Hala Sampler (libbi, falafel, grape leaves, hummus, and tabouli) is a great way to start.

Representing a point of origin on the other side of the



globe, Beignets Caribbean Cafe offers the rich and flavorful foods of Haiti—influenced by West African and French cuisines and infused with Caribbean ingredients. While Griot (fried pork) and Legim (vegetable stews made with eggplant, cabbage, and other vegetables) are quite popular, one of Beignets' most sought-after dishes is Mixed Beef & Legumes. For more of an adventure, try the Jerk Chicken (a house special) or Queue Boeuf (oxtail meat in a savory sauce).

Of course, there are larger and better-designed restaurants that serve equally interesting, intriguing, and delicious ethnic foods including 5th Element (Indian), Peony Asian Bistro (Chinese), and Blue Orchid Thai Cuisine.

While there are numerous Indian restaurants in and around Jacksonville, especially along Baymeadows Road between Southside Boulevard and Philips Highway, 5th Element gets consistently high praise. Known for its extensive menu and welcoming hospitality, it is arguably one of the best in the city.

For individuals familiar with the rich and exotic flavors of India, try one of their dosas (mildly spiced thin and crispy crepe), biryani (saffron-infused basmati rice served with either vegetables, eggs, spiced chicken, spiced mutton, lamb, prawns, or chicken legs), Goat Pepper Fry (a house special), or any of their enchanting curries. No matter what you select, it's all wonderfully delicious and satisfying.

As with Italian, Mexican, and Japanese (sushi) cuisines, Chinese is nothing new. That being said, there are a few worth highlighting as truly authentic—Timwah Dim Sum, Blue Bamboo, and Peony Asian Bistro.

If you enjoy dim sum, it is the specialty of the house at Timwah Dim Sum. You won't go wrong with their Pork or Shrimp Shu Mai, spring rolls, or Pan-Fried Chive Dumplings. Be sure to check out their whimsical Red Bean Piggie Bun for dessert.

Visitors to Blue Bamboo are welcomed into a spacious, modern, and comfortable setting. While their menu is expansive with lots of tasty Chinese offerings, you'll want to save room for Chef Dennis Chan's Sunshine State Orange Cake, the grand prize winner in General Mills' 2018 Neighborhood to Nation Recipe Contest.

If your preference is Peking Duck, check out Peony Asian Bistro. According to Stacy Cheang, the restaurant's owner, this dish is one of the most authentic and popular

on their menu, featuring specially marinated whole duck that's been roasted until the skin is golden brown and crispy; served with steamed buns, cucumber, and green onion. Another favorite not to be missed is their Crispy Whole Fish (snapper or striped bass). In response to increased awareness and demand, they've also added a selection of dim sum including Shrimp Shumai and Pork Shumai.

When it comes to Thai cuisine, Blue Orchid is one of a small handful of restaurants that delivers truly remarkable and memorable experiences. With just one glance, you'll know you're in for something special. According to owner Jeff Schofield, "It has always been our goal to inspire a love for the culture and cuisine of Thailand. When you visit Blue Orchid, you'll have an authentically conceived, warm, and enjoyable Thai experience."

One of their most intriguing dishes is a starter—Chaw Mooung (flower buds)—a delicacy once made for the King of Thailand and unique to Blue Orchid. These are brilliantly violet rice flour pastries (made with dried



At right, Blue Orchid

butterfly flowers) stuffed with chicken, toasted sesame seeds, peanuts, and coconut. Of course, there are plenty of other options to choose from on their extensive menu.

When it comes to ethnic cuisine in Jacksonville, you could spend a lifetime exploring. It's certainly worth breaking out and trying some of these places from time to time. Be sure to take friends—you'll get more options for sampling with a larger party. As long as everyone is open-minded, willing to share, and happy to assume a little risk, you'll create experiences and memories that last forever.

A FEW FAVORITES

Jacksonville has an incredibly diverse ethnic population that supports a tremendous number of ethnic restaurants. While we could fill this entire magazine with listings and recommendations, these are just a few that we believe you'll enjoy.

CHINESE

Blue Bamboo (Mandarin)
10110 San Jose Blvd
(904) 646-1478

Peony Asian Bistro (Mandarin)
10586 Old St Augustine Rd.
904 268 3889

Timwah Dim Sum (Southside)
8358 Point Meadows Dr.
904 329 3676

COLOMBIAN

Delicias Colombianas (Southside)
10771 Beach Blvd
(904) 527-3905

Salento Colombian Steakhouse
(San Jose)
11018 Old St Augustine Rd.
904 374 5882

CUBAN/CARIBBEAN

Beignets Caribbean Cafe
(Southside)
4770 Barnes Rd.
904 737 6789

Mambos Cuban Cafe
(Intracoastal West)
13770 Beach Blvd
904 374 2046

DOMINICAN
Puerto Plata (Lakeshore)
2045 Bayview Rd.
904 388 5888

ETHIOPIAN
Nile Ethiopian (San Jose)
6715 Powers Ave.
904 731 0005

FILIPINO / PACIFIC ISLANDER
Marianas Grinds (Southside)
11380-10 Beach Boulevard,
206 612 6596

GERMAN
German Schnitzel Haus
(Intracoastal West)
13475 Atlantic Blvd
904 221 9700

INDIAN
5th Element (Baymeadows)
9485 Baymeadows Rd
904 448 8265

Apna (Southside)
10769 Beach Blvd
904 645 3334

IRISH
Culhane's Irish Pub
(Two locations: Atlantic Beach and Baymeadows)
967 Atlantic Blvd.
9720 Deer Lake Ct.
904 249 9595

KOREAN
Gangnam Korean
(Beach Blvd near St. Nicholas)
5161 Beach Blvd.
904 396 4008

Hotpot & BBQ (Southside)
11380 Beach Blvd
904 990 8888

Sam Won Garden Korean BBQ
(Southside)
4345 University Blvd.
904 737 3650

**MIDDLE EASTERN / GREEK /
LEBANESE**
Beirut (Baymeadows)
3928 Baymeadows Rd
904 660 2136

Hala's Mideast Eatery and Market (Southside)
4323 University Blvd S
904 733 1855

Mandaloun Mediterranean Cuisine (Baymeadows)
9862 Old Baymeadows Rd.
904 646 1881

Noura's Cafe (Lakewood)
1533 University Blvd. W.
nouracafe.com
904 739 0033

THAI
Blue Orchid Thai Cuisine
(Intracoastal West)
13475 Atlantic Blvd.
904 723 1300

Lemongrass Thai Bistro
(Old St Augustine)
14866 Old St Augustine Rd.
904 647 5043

Thai & Lao Bistro (Regency)
9537 Regency Square Blvd
904 619 9926

VIETNAMESE
A Bit of Saigon (Intracoastal West)
3503 Kernan Blvd S
904 379 5752

Bowl of Pho (Deerwood)
9902 Old Baymeadows Rd
904 645 4455

Pho Viet (Mayport)
sites.google.com/site/phovietfl/menu
904 249 8006

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Ethical Deli Products Prevail

Products that focus on quality, integrity, responsibility and sustainability are the focus for a growing number of consumers

BY JEFFREY SPEAR

Ever since Julia Child appeared on American television, and cooking became more approachable, consumers have been looking to improve the ways in which they purchase, prepare and consume food. This has been especially true over the last few decades with the launch of The Food Network, the explosion of reality television featuring food, and online resources talking about every aspect of food.

With all of this in mind, it's no surprise that consumers have become more aware of the ways in which farming and manufacturing of food impacts their health, wellbeing and lifestyle. While they seek out foods that are flavorful and deliver enjoyable and engaging culinary experiences, they are embracing ethical eating—demanding unprecedented levels of quality, integrity, responsibility and sustainability from everyone along the supply chain, including farmers, ingredient suppliers, manufacturers, brand owners and retailers.

Increased Visibility

As a result of these consumer-led pressures, we're seeing increased transparency in operations and significant changes in the way in which food is brought to market and presented within retail settings.

Federally mandated compliance in terms of product identification, nutrition facts and ingredients continue to be updated and adjusted to better align with emerging health science and consumer preferences. We are also seeing significant changes in the way producers communicate features and benefits associated with their products. While they have successfully relied on subjective claims, such as "100% Natural," "Authentic" and "Artisanal" for years, veri-

fiable certifications including "OU Kosher" and "Certified Organic" have contributed to their credibility. Products defined as "locally-sourced" or "Made in the U.S." have also been well received. The standards for excellence, especially when it comes to deli meats, are now considerably more advanced.

The most apparent is the prominent placement of sales statements that describe products as free from hormones, antibiotics and GMOs.

Animal Welfare

In the wake of exposés, including the film "Food Inc.," Jonathan Foer's book "Eating Animals" and growing pressure from animal rights and environmental groups, consumers have become increasingly concerned about animal welfare and the impact of large scale, industrialized food production on the environment.

There was alarm among consumers when Hormel acquired Bridgewater Township, NJ-based Applegate in 2015. The good news, according to Beth Deegan, Applegate's director of brand management, is that "Applegate did not sell out, but Hormel bought in."

Kathy Eckhouse, co-owner of La Quercia Cured Meats, based in Norwalk, IA, has additional concerns "Here in Iowa, the farms and the animals are our neighbors. We see the ill effects of CAFO (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation) production on the land and water."

According to American-Humane, which advocates for the health and safety of animals, less than 10 percent of Americans trust corporations to do the right thing. This is especially true for Millennials, the most influential buying force in the U.S.

Born between 1977 and 2000, these individuals are expecting greater transparency from manufacturers, foods that are organic, locally sourced and sustainable, and are willing to pay more.

Verifying Practices

Recognizing these dynamics, a growing number of farmers, producers and marketers have adopted the Five Freedoms outlined by American Humane (described as the gold standard of animal welfare) and are embracing third-party certifications that verify humane treatment of animals on the farm—from birth all the way through to handling and slaughter at meat processing facilities. The most widely accepted of these certifications are "Animal Welfare Approved (AWA)," "Certified Humane" and "Global Animal Partnership (GAP)."

Third-party verification and certification for many of the issues associated with environmental responsibility and the humane treatment of animals did not come into use until recently. The Certified Humane program was unveiled by Humane Farm Animal Care in 2003, the Non-GMO Project started in 2007, GAP in 2008 and AWA in 2014. While all of these certifying organizations are making headway, and consumers are becoming increasingly aware of their importance, they still have a long way to go.

For companies such as Niman Ranch in Westminster, CO; Salt Lake City, UT-based Creminelli, Applegate and La Quercia, the notion of quality, integrity, sustainability and humane treatment of animals is nothing new. Having embraced these practices as an essential part of their operations, these brands have become distinguished advocates.

Niman Ranch has a clearly defined mission that ensures its products are always all natural and the animals are always humanely raised on environmentally-sustainable ranches. The company also participates in the Certified Humane program and proudly displays this certificate on the front of every product.

According to Russ Smoke, vice president of prepared meats at Niman Ranch, “We pay for 100 percent of our farmers to be certified. We’re very appreciative of our third party certifiers, partners, farmers and ranchers, who all work together to make us the best we can be.” From a qualitative perspective, Smoke adds “Animals raised with care on sustainable farms yield the highest quality meat. You can tell the difference. The quality translates into fantastic finished cooked and smoked products.”

At Creminelli, producers of noteworthy artisan salami, a similar philosophy prevails. According to Chris Bowler, CEO and founder “The best quality finished products start with humanely-treated animals raised on family farms. In contrast to industrialized brands that rely upon conventionally-raised animals, our meats are well-marbled, allowing them to age properly and yield a consistently flavorful finished product.”

Advocating the Cause

In order to effectively inform and educate consumers about the efforts being made to improve the quality, integrity and healthfulness of deli meats, there are tremendous opportunities for issue advocacy. Considering that many responsibly-produced deli products are found in self-serve refrigerated cases and hang wall displays adjacent to the service counter, the depth of information that can be displayed in this space is limited, relying on the buyer to pick up and inspect individual packages that may or may not have vital information included on their labels. When it comes to the service counter, there is little evidence that advocacy for ethical eating is taking place at all, either through staff insights, signage or handout literature.

Healthy food retailers, such as Whole Foods, Sprouts Farmers Market, Earth Fare and Lucky’s Market, are some of the most visible advocates for ethical eating. That being said, meaningful depth of information and links to third-party resources is not available at the deli counter. For consumers eager to obtain product-related information, they must seek out and visit

supermarket and manufacturer websites or follow these organizations on social media.

Earth Fare’s website proclaims, “We are passionate about healthy meat raised by farmers dedicated to sustainable agricultural practices that support the health of the animal and our environment. Because every purchase of sustainably-farmed meat is a vote in support of family farms, humanely-treated animals and good health.” Similarly, the Lucky’s Market website states, “Through a variety of partnerships, we support the conservation and restoration of our local environment. We

to Applegate. Deegan explains, “We’re constantly watching for emerging culinary trends, looking for those things that will better align with our customer’s lifestyle.”

As part of their effort to satisfy growing demand for both convenience and snackability, Applegate has just launched a new line of snacking products. One of the more distinctive is their Charcuterie Plate, containing uncured Genoa salami, Cheddar, roasted salted almonds and dark chocolate chunks. La Quercia has also responded with their pre-sliced Ridgetop Prosciutto Piccante rubbed with fennel and red chili.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CREMINELLI

foster support for local farmers and producers by promoting the sale of their products.”

From a manufacturing perspective, savvy producers understand that, while communicating their humane treatment of animals and responsible stewardship of the land is important, the larger issue is delivering excellent food experiences and catering to the lifestyle preferences of their customers. The good news is that ethical deli brands are paying attention to consumer trends and preferences and have responded remarkably well.

Staying abreast of consumer preferences and culinary trends is nothing new

For everyone along the supply chain, there are untapped opportunities to advocate the benefits of ethical eating leading up to, and including, the point of sale. Creminelli’s Bowler suggests, “We believe the industry has to move towards, and eventually align its practices with, humanely-raised animals and environmental stewardship.” In the meantime, and through third-party verification, adherence to governmental mandates, and actions that respond appropriately to evolving consumer preferences that favor better quality foods and healthier lifestyles, there are plenty of ways to keep the ball rolling. **DB**

CUSTOM CONTENT

THE ** Wonders ** OF WATERCRESS

**Distinctive Flavor
and Versatility in a
Powerful Green Leaf**



**Watercress Pesto –
Executive Chef Michael
Ponzio, Union League
Club of Chicago**



**Pork Belly Egg
Sandwich –
Executive Chef
Michael Ponzio,
Union League Club
of Chicago**

Culinary preferences have been leaning towards more healthful and nutrient-dense foods for some time. While kale has been hogging the spotlight as the nutritional darling among edible greens, watercress has been overlooked. What’s surprising is that watercress packs an equally healthful punch and is considered the most nutritionally dense green on the planet. From a culinary perspective, it’s undeniably more flavorful and tender.

Watercress is one of the oldest foods known to man. Recognized historically for its medicinal applications, there’s a well-founded body of science to support its abundantly healthful properties.

This cruciferous green is naturally low in calories; packed with 28 vitamins, minerals and compounds; and a great way to naturally boost immunity. Stunningly high in antioxidants, watercress displays remarkable anti-inflammatory, anti-viral

and anti-bacterial properties. It has received a perfect score on the CDC and ANDI nutritional scales, earning its reputation as a true “superleaf.” While collard greens, mustard greens and kale display nutritional value as well, watercress is unrivaled in culinary and sensory appeal.

In the foodservice arena, watercress is lending its vibrant green color and flavor suggestive of black pepper to a variety of dishes throughout the menu. It seems that increasing numbers of leading chefs have been learning about watercress, finding it an incredibly tender, versatile and flavor-forward ingredient that provides a noticeable lift to the dishes they create.

Michael Ponzio, Executive Chef at the Union League Club of Chicago, reveals, “I’m a big fan of watercress. It adds a ton of fresh flavor and depth to salads and sandwiches, contrasts nicely to the char on grilled meats, makes a great soup and pesto, and adds a

touch of elegance to every dish. The fact that it’s incredibly healthy and holds up nicely on the plate makes it that much more attractive.”

In a similar light, Mark DeLeo, CEO for B&W Quality Growers (a stalwart producer of watercress since 1870) says, “While Asian and Latino chefs have been fans of watercress for a long time, we’re seeing marked increase in awareness and demand among global cuisines and across every foodservice segment. We’re finding that more and more chefs are becoming aware of this remarkable leafy green and have recognized its utility. They’re finding a place for it spanning day parts and menu parts and appreciate that it holds up well in take-out and home-delivery orders.”

With its incredible health and culinary benefits, fresh and vibrant watercress is the perfect compliment to every menu, from fast to upscale casual to fine dining and everything in between.

** For recipe ideas featuring watercress, visit bwqualitygrowers.com.



CUSTOM CONTENT

Off-Premise Takes Flight

Essential Ingredients for Restaurant Survival

In response to the global health pandemic, restaurateurs have been scrambling to overcome staggering losses and keep their businesses afloat. From fast-casual to Michelin-starred, operators are displaying incredible creativity, launching and/or expanding takeout options, converting a portion of their storefronts to retail operations, conducting demo videos, offering portable cocktail solutions, and more. They're also introducing DIY meal kits, giving patrons an entertaining, hands-on culinary experience at home.

While these programs offer undeniably beneficial boosts to cash flow, the National Restaurant Association's May tracking survey indicates restaurateurs expect sales, employment, and capital spending levels to remain dampened through the end of the year. As such, new programs need to be implemented in a manner that will resonate consistently with patrons over time, offset growing numbers of competitors, and be sustainable. Restaurateurs also need to anticipate potential weaknesses along the supply chain, working with vendors that can help with reliable delivery of beef, pork, and other essential ingredients.

Bringing the Restaurant Experience Home

Along with the obvious convenience, consumers are looking for ways to enjoy restaurant-quality foods at home. As such, they're requesting takeout and meal-delivery services from their favorite cafés, bistros, and fine-dining establishments.



Pork Ramen – Executive Chef Guy Meikle, *Heritage Restaurant & Caviar Bar*

According to Guy Meikle, Executive Chef and President of the Heritage Restaurant & Caviar Bar in Chicago, "There's obvious demand from our loyal patrons for some of our most notable dishes. We're learning, however, that signature dishes easily served on-premise cannot necessarily be packaged and transported for home

consumption in a manner that maintains culinary integrity. We've had to adjust our menu to include dishes that are a bit more casual and manageable while providing pleasant reminders of previous dine-in encounters."

With a tremendous variety of cuisines and cooking styles, it's essential to understand how a carefully prepared dish will be experienced once it's left the restaurant. In this regard, the selection and handling of ingredients becomes critical.

As co-owner of A Sharper Palate and The Westover in Richmond, Va., Chef Tuffy Stone says, "We know that fried foods get soggy over time and some foods can be easily overcooked when reheated. As such, we're putting an incredible amount of study into our takeout menus, adjusting ingredients so that the meals we deliver are received with the same enthusiasm as those served in-house."

He continues, "When it comes to steaks and chops, meats with higher internal fat content such as pork belly and brisket hold up better in takeout dishes. We're also leaning toward sliced flank steak and beef tenderloin

that work particularly well at room temperature in salads and other cold dishes.”

In many cases, chefs and restaurateurs look to Tyson Fresh Meats, known for their consistently high standards, extensive range of innovative beef and pork products, and reliable customer service, to help build their off-premise menus. They understand that selecting the right cuts of meat and addressing issues such as flavor profile, fat content, texture, serving size, and portion controls can make or break both the dine-in and off-premise



Heritage Steak Burger – Executive Chef Guy Meikle, *Heritage Restaurant & Caviar Bar*

items suitably warm. With the popularity of meal kits, the way in which multiple dishes are packaged and transported requires careful consideration as well.

Additionally, while health concerns prevail, some consumers still take issue with the impact disposables have on the environment. In this regard, restaurateurs now have to weigh costs vs. sustainable solutions for take-out materials. While there are a wide variety of recycled, recyclable, and compostable service items made from corn, bamboo, wheat, bagasse (a byproduct of sugarcane processing), and plant-based plastics, the cost equation becomes a more complex one for them.

In an industry where first-year survival rates are already low, it's clear that restaurateurs have reached an important juncture. While the future is anything but clear, those who can adapt, innovate, and continue to deliver worthwhile and compelling culinary experiences on-premise, as well as through takeout and home delivery, stand a greater chance of survival.



Red Wine Braised Beef Brisket Meal Package – Executive Chef Tuffy Stone, *A Sharper Palate*

experience. This is especially true in situations where meats must be selected and tailored to satisfy demanding culinary specifications and price parameters.

Packaging Matters

Apart from ingredients, the style and structure of packaging is vitally important as well. For both curbside pickup and home delivery, there are new materials, structural configurations, and technologies that help maintain the temperature, appearance, and integrity of prepared dishes, keeping cold items adequately chilled and hot



Taking the Leap

Exploring alternatives in food retailing makes sense. Before you start, these are a few key issues to consider.



Evaluate Your Menu

Not all dishes are suitable for off-premise consumption. Work out which menu items are consistent with your culinary reputation and can be effectively reconfigured. Test these items with staff, friends, and family, then obtain feedback related to portability, food integrity, and overall satisfaction.



Confirm Demand

Avoid risky investments by quantifying your competitors and qualifying your offer. Make sure demand exceeds existing supply.



Budget Wisely

Decide whether the expansion of service will be a short-term solution or a long-term addition, and then confirm the financial commitment you're willing to make.



Division of Labor

Packaged meals require special training and staff dedicated to fulfilling orders. Assign responsibilities to ensure consistent and accurate handling, packaging, and delivery.



Packaging Decisions

Plan out the structure and needs of your to-go menu options and determine which packaging solutions make the most sense. Diagram the location of menu items in the packaging to make it replicable and easy for staff to follow.



Technology Rules

Off-premise sales are conducted through websites, mobile applications, and integrated POS systems. Employ technologies that align with BOH, FOH, and consumer needs and are user-friendly.



Communicate Clearly

Make sure your patrons are aware of newly installed takeout and delivery programs. Exterior and interior signage, coupled with carefully coordinated messages on your website and social media channels, will get the word out.



Licensing Matters

Make sure you have all the necessary certificates, permits, and licenses for off-premise sales. While exemptions may be available in the short-term, you'll want to be prepared for the long-term and avoid penalties.

Want to learn more, visit
www.tysonfreshmeats.com

Grab & Go - Driving Visible Change at the Deli Counter

Convenience, quality and portability are what matter in today's grab and go sections.

BY JEFFREY SPEAR

There are a few enduring truths that impact just about every aspect of food retailing. While packaging and presentation may stimulate trial, it's overall culinary enjoyment and nutritional benefits that will keep buyers coming back for more. Of course, providing value (price and performance combined) is equally important, albeit subjective. There is, however, one still-emerging and highly influential trend that is creating a more level playing field.

Today's consumers are looking for ways

to satisfy their cravings, both at traditional mealtimes as well as for snacking, in ways that are fast, convenient and worry free. In response, food retailers are creating and stocking products that resonate effectively with their key buyers, promise and effectively deliver value, and represent time saving convenience. Commonly known as "grab and go," this latest retail phenomenon is driving visible change, especially at the deli counter.

According to recently published statistics from London-based research firm

Mintel, more than 70 percent of grocery shoppers report they do all of their shopping in-store. Even shoppers aged 18-34, known for their technology-driven preferences, are likely to do most or all of their grocery shopping in-store.

Mintel also reports that on-the-go consumers looking for grab and go mealtime and snacking solutions are expecting higher levels of quality and options that align with their dietary agenda and lifestyles.

The bottom line, repeated by operators across every category and channel, is that

It's also clear that the growing demand for more exotic and esoteric flavors is influencing the way that grab and go salads and sandwiches are being prepared.

grab and go isn't going away any time soon.

Variety Has It

Knowing that the concept of grab and go is intended to be a time saving and stress free experience, retailers must offer a wide variety of foods catering to a broad spectrum of culinary preferences that are fully prepared, conveniently packaged and ready to go without the need for uncomfortable delays at the service counter or having to stand in time-consuming lines. They must also merchandise these products in a manner that makes them easy to find and quickly understood.

With this in mind, especially since deli departments have been expanding their scope of service to include higher quality and ethnically-inspired prepared foods, there is an undeniable opportunity to engage with, and provide fresh, flavorful and quality-oriented mealtime and snacking solutions to a sizeable audience.

According to Tal Shoshan, CEO at Chattanooga, TN-based Five Star Foods, makers of Simply Fresh salads, snack and meal kits, "Convenience is single-handedly driving growth in the category. Consumers are time-starved and looking for meal solutions that are checking multiple boxes—taste, portion control, value and convenience. In response, we deliver a vertically integrated program from field to fresh grab and go products that meets the needs of the entire family.

When asked about the relatively short shelf life of some grab and go products, Shoshan continues "Managing short shelf life products is always challenging for both retailers and suppliers. It can be a deterrent. We are finding, however, that most retailers have found ways to manage these issues, are embracing our product lines and are increasingly more successful in bringing fresh and innovative grab and go items to their shoppers."

One of the more noticeable grab and go

options gaining popularity is mealtime kits. There are dip kits (hummus and guacamole are increasingly popular in this configuration), snack kits (combinations of sliced cheese, sliced meats, sliced fresh fruit, nuts, dried fruit, crackers, cookies and/or candies) and sandwich kits.

It's also clear that the growing demand for more exotic and esoteric flavors is influencing the way that grab and go salads and sandwiches are being prepared. While long time standards, including ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, Blue cheese, ranch, Caesar, balsamic and coleslaw, still dominate the landscape, flavors that embrace Latino, Mediterranean, Southeast Asian and North African influences, including sriracha, cilantro, ginger, harissa and gochujang, are finding receptive audiences.

For on the go consumers, sandwiches and wraps are in constant demand. That being said, ethnically-inspired hand-held preparations, such as empanadas, burritos, tamales, sushi, spring rolls and summer rolls, have been finding their way into supermarket deli offerings.

An All-day Affair

It's important to keep in mind that grab and go provides convenient meal options for all day parts. As such, preparations that include traditional breakfast ingredients should not be overlooked.

"Buyers can't get enough breakfast items," says Todd Martin, co-founder and executive vice president, customer development, for Arizona's Tucson Tamale. "When it comes to grab and go, we're seeing obvious demand for these items, along with greater variety overall."

Many bakeries are modifying their production to include, not only full-size breads, cakes and pies, but single-serve offerings, as well. One such producer, known for sandwich breads and sweet baked goods, is St. Pierre, based in Manchester, England. Paul Baker, founder of St Pierre

Groupe, explains "We've just launched the St Pierre On the Go range to satisfy the growing demand for grab and go items. We wanted to create a broad range of products to satisfy consumers throughout the day—morning, afternoon or night—with a combination of bestsellers like our Waffles and Crepes as well as new products like the Rocky Road Bar and Chocolate Caramel Shortbread Bar."

There's also a sizeable assortment of single-serve products typically found in center aisles that can be merchandised in the deli department as part of grab and go offerings. Products including chips, pretzels, nuts, crackers, fruit cups and energy bars can all be cross promoted, making it easier for shoppers to organize their purchases without having to traverse the entire store. While enticing buyers into the aisles may generate additional revenue, providing an efficient and convenient shopping experience is paramount.

In order to create a broader range of grab and go offerings in-store, and eliminate waiting time at the service counter, retailers are employing a wider range of packaging configurations, including single-serve snack packs, multi-serve party platters and containers featuring multiple cavities for meal kits, multi-part salads and snack combos.

Hope Ramseyer, marketing communications manager for Display Pack, based in Cedar Springs, MI, explains, "We're working with customers to launch unique, brand-specific items. Our customers are acutely aware that success in the grab and go arena is dependent on catching the consumer's eye on the store shelf and then delivering a positive branded experience.

When asked about untapped opportunity for grab and go products, she continues, "Convenience is the number one growing food industry trend. We're helping brand owners capitalize on this trend with grab and go packaging solutions optimized for their production processes and effective merchandising on store shelves." While the majority of grab and go products are refrigerated, she makes a noteworthy suggestion. "Deli counters that traditionally offer warm food from behind the service counter could benefit from warmed meal kits merchandised on their own."

Without a doubt, the addition of an attractive self-service case stocked with an assortment of packaged foods and beverages, both hot and cold, can create extra revenue without a lot of dedicated labor or

operational complexity.

The Packaging Factor

Of course, retailers must anticipate more than just merchandising and display options to create meaningful and productive grab and go experiences. In this regard, Madison, WI-based Placon offers grab and go packaging solutions that come with vented or non-vented lids, anticipate modular stacking, have easy to open tab mechanisms and can be reheated in the microwave.

Recognizing that many grab and go options include both wet and dry ingredients, or aromatic items that could negatively impact other foods in a meal kit, the company has developed packaging solutions that include inserts, internal lids and other such barriers to segregate foods prior to consumption. Going one step further, recognizing the attention that consumers give to environmental impact, many of these containers can be washed and reused. When properly disposed, they are completely recyclable.

Along with decisions relating to specific food offerings and packaging materials associated with them, supermarket deli managers may wish to explore ways to increase their capacity when preparing grab and go offerings in store. Eric Wangler, president and CEO at Jaccard Corp., a Rochester, NY-based company known for innovative product design, suggests, "When you look around today, consumers are pressed for time. Concurrently, our customers struggle to find workers and face escalating labor costs. Anything we can do to increase convenience and minimize labor drives value for both consumers and our customers. This is a major reason why the demand for our automated stacker slicers, and the production efficiencies they provide, is rapidly growing."

Effective grab and go programs are built on a foundation of time-saving convenience. While portion size, packaging and merchandising are important, providing consistently enjoyable and satisfying culinary experiences is essential. Knowing that today's shopper is also seeking ways to maintain healthier and more active lifestyles, the products being stocked need to cater to these preferences, as well.

There's still tremendous opportunity in the shop and go arena. Whether retailers take advantage of both hot and refrigerated options, a larger number of ethnically-inspired foods or simply greater variety, the alternatives are considerable. **DB**





Thai Style Yellow Curry -
Exec Chef Denise St. Onge,
Greens Restaurant,
San Francisco

BUSINESS CONTENT

DELICIOUS, VERSATILE AND NUTRITIOUS

The Undeniable Appeal of Brown Rice and Whole Grains

Well-informed consumers are seeking out new, adventurous and healthier food experiences. Chefs are meeting this demand with undeniably creative menus showcasing intriguing globally influenced and plant-based offerings that feature leafy greens, locally grown vegetables, and whole grains such as brown rice and quinoa.

Whether globally influenced or plant-based, rice has been an essential component for just about every conceivable cuisine in recorded culinary history. Recognizing this versatility, chefs have found whole-grain brown rice lends flavor, texture and familiarity to increasingly popular dishes such as stir fries, curries, salads, tacos and paella.

Compared to white rice, brown rice is minimally processed, retains its bran layer and cereal germ, and represents a healthy promise. For these reasons (and others, no doubt), chefs and consumers are indicating a preference for this nutty and wholesome ingredient. In fact, its appearance on menus has increased 17% in the past four years (to 11.6% menu penetration) per Datassential.

Younger consumers (Millennials and Gen Z) are especially partial to brown rice. In other Datassential research 93% of all consumers are familiar with the ingredient. And in fact, in their Plant-Based Eating Keynote, March 2018, 60% of consumers love or like brown rice.

Going to Grain Lengths

At Greens Restaurant, a renowned vegetarian eatery in San Francisco, brown rice is a staple. "Our guests are definitely health-oriented and ask for brown rice all the time," says Executive Chef Denise St. Onge. "Of course, we recognize its versatility, flavor and texture, and use it regularly, especially in our stir-fry and curry dishes. We even specify brown rice as an integral part of our

Greens To Go menu, a healthy grab-and-go concept that operates from the front of our restaurant."

Brown rice is also popular at Bayona and Rosedale in New Orleans. "Our patrons eat a lot of rice and appreciate the inclusion of brown rice whenever it's served," says Susan Spicer, chef/owner of both establishments. "From a culinary perspective, we're always on the lookout for interesting combinations. We find that brown rice pairs particularly well with fish served with a citrus gastrique and ginger, as well as with duck."

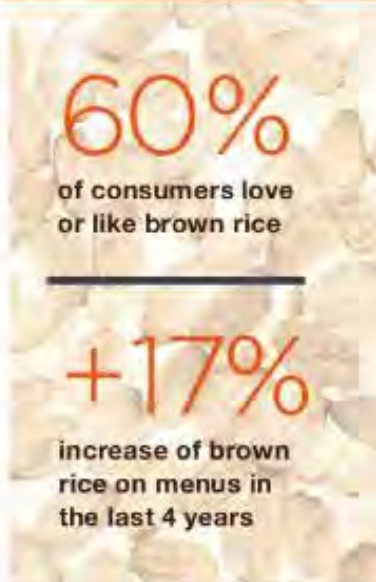
Rice bowls are also appearing on menus across every category of foodservice—from fast casual to high-end. According to the National Restaurant Association's *What's Hot: 2020 Culinary Forecast*, bowls are ranked fourth out of 133 menu trends for 2020.

Recognizing that mainstream and health-conscious consumers find bowls satisfying and delicious, chefs are expressing their creativity by layering and contrasting intensely colorful fresh and marinated vegetables with seeds, nuts and cheeses.

When it comes to protein, these layered beauties can be topped off simply with tofu, sliced chicken or poached egg—or more dramatically with grilled salmon, flank steak or duck confit.

Brown rice, quinoa and various blends of whole grains are appealing to increasing numbers of health-oriented consumers, as well as to chefs who are looking to elevate their traditional white rice-based dishes in terms of nutrition, texture and flavor. These grains are readily available in low-cost single-grain and grain-blend products, allowing chefs to easily exploit their culinary visions in a variety of presentations.

For recipe ideas featuring brown rice, visit MarsFoodservices.com.



Turkey Medallions, Acorn Squash,
Sour Cherry Brown Rice -
Brandt Evans Exec Chef, *Blue
Canyon and Tavern*, Twinsburg,
Ohio; Plate Online

CUSTOM CONTENT

INNOVATIVE COMBINATIONS DELIVER OPTIMUM FLAVOR

Clockwise from left: Poached Alaska king crab with kabocha squash risotto, Kevin Davis, *Blueacre*, Seattle, Wash.; Halibut with plum, leeks, black lime, Sieger Bayer, *The Publican*, Chicago, IL.; Alaska sockeye salmon with green garbanzo beans, roasted beet muhammara and sumac, *Avec*, Chicago, IL.; and Golden Ossetra caviar in salad with spinach and wilted chanterelles and matsutakes, Ryan Pfeiffer, *Blackbird*, Chicago, IL.



Nick Jurch



Andrea Donadla



Isabelle Langheim

SEAFOOD AND VEGGIES

Restaurateurs have increasingly better access to an incredible variety of wild caught seafood and just harvested vegetables.

While their nutritional benefits are valued, enterprising chefs are challenging the status quo, finding ways to showcase the best possible ingredients, exploiting the ways in which their flavors, textures, and other naturally occurring qualities contribute to heightened culinary experiences.

Along with dishes that are engaging and nutritious, chefs and consumers alike are seeking out foods that are traceable and sustainably produced. It's no surprise that wild caught seafood species, such as king crab, salmon and several varieties of whitefish from Alaska, have become favorites. Similarly, locally grown and seasonally available vegetables, along with highly nutritious ancient grains and pulses, have become highly prized.

Chef Kevin Davis, recognized for his support of responsibly harvested fish, guides the culinary output of his Seattle-based restaurant—*Blueacre Seafood*. He prefers dishes that are pure and clean, allowing the natural colors, textures, and flavors of seafoods and vegetables to stand on their own merits.

He mentions seasonal cruciferous vegetables including golden and purple cauliflowers, broccoli, and radishes. With

careful roasting and caramelizing, they retain their color and texture while lending a hint of sweetness to the dishes they accompany. He also favors locally grown tomatoes, transforming them into an exquisite conserva. When used as a sauce on a bed of pasta, it lends flavorful contrast to simply prepared wild caught Alaska king salmon.

According to Ryan Pfeiffer, Executive Chef at Chicago's renowned *Blackbird*, "We prefer to feature ingredients for their intrinsic qualities, as opposed to showcasing the ways in which they can be modified." This includes the use of contrasting flavors—apparent in the way he prepares Sablefish—marinating the fish overnight in the style of misoyaki using white miso, mirin, and sugar, adding a touch of sweetness. To offset this sweetness, he serves the fish with treviso and grapefruit in an emulsified sauce similar to a beurre blanc.

Of course, it's not just the creative approach applied to seafoods and vegetables that makes the dining experience special. While ingredients

may be carefully sourced, prepared, and plated, the wines that accompany these dishes are equally important.

Restaurateurs are promoting wines that are as esoteric as the foods they serve, including varietals such as Sangiovese, Gewurztraminer, and Sancerre. This is certainly the case for Parke Ulrich, Executive Chef at *Waterbar*, a premier seafood restaurant situated on the water's edge in San Francisco. "We try to educate our guests, getting them to try both foods and wines that are different from their everyday," Ulrich continues, "We have found some remarkable varietals, including Riesling and Gruner Veltliner, that pair exceptionally well with many of our fish and shellfish dishes."

All of these chefs recognize that the success of a dish comes from more than just the protein at the center of the plate. What is abundantly clear is that the flavor and integrity associated with every

ingredient, and the wines served, needs to be exceptional, allowing inherent qualities to be fully revealed and enjoyed.



For recipes and more, visit www.alaskaseafood.org/foodservice

Seafood taps into specialty food sector's "tin-to-table" trend

By Jeffrey Spear

Things were heating up for seafood in the specialty food sector this summer.



JULY MARKED THE 64th Summer Fancy Food Show in New York, a major event for the specialty food sector that saw 34,000 attendees from all market segments connecting with the domestic and international brands of more than 2,400 exhibitors. While its focus has much to do with cheese, preserves, cakes, candies, snacks, cured meats, sauces, spreads, beverages, and every other imaginable gourmet food, there's a definite place for seafood as well.

Without a doubt, seafood exhibitors are a minority at this show. However, those that did exhibit this year featured undeniably innovative and highly desirable products, the majority being pre-packed and shelf-stable. From imported caviar and wild-caught tuna to seafood jerky and exotic tinned seafoods, the variety was considerable.

As a seafood exhibitor at a specialty food event, it's all about maintaining a competitive advantage, introducing new and innovative products, keeping abreast of industry dynamics, and anticipating emerging trends, according to Delphine Lannoy, the sales and marketing manager for Gourmet House Caviar. "Exhibitions are a key factor in our marketing strategy," said Lannoy. "It offers us the opportunity to showcase our products, and also meet with large numbers of buyers, media and sellers. We have to be where the competition is!"

Ron Christianson, vice president of retail

sales for Ocean Beauty, said the Summer Fancy Food Show is just one of several that contribute effectively to his company's overall marketing agenda. "Fancy Food allows us to support our New York and Northeast-based accounts. That being said, we do all the Fancy Food shows regularly," he said. "After all, it only takes one or two new good customers to make a show worthwhile."

For producers, retailers, and restaurateurs operating on the leading edge of the culinary industry, especially individuals looking for specialty seafood products, roaming the aisles at Fancy Food is a must. The first-hand experience provides key insights into new brands, products, exotic points of origin, and emerging consumer trends.

On the other side of the booth, seafood firms showcasing their products at specialty food events are given real-time access to new consumer groups. Seeking to educate and inform as broad an audience as possible, Greece-based Trikalinos featured their Grey Mullet Bottarga at this year's Summer Fancy Food Show. This golden fish roe is considered one of the finest alternatives to caviar and a prized ingredient by leading chefs around the world, including Ferran Adria, Thomas Keller, and José Andrés.

Of course, there were many other interesting finds that emerged out of this year's event, including Acme Smoked Fish Corp's single-





serve Poke Bowls, Epic Food's Salmon Jerky, and Grizzly's Maple Smoked Salmon Candies, to name a few.

When it comes to trend-spotting, products described as sustainable and environmentally responsible could be found everywhere. Without a doubt, these claims have proven invaluable, with many seafood producers aligning themselves with organizations such as the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership, the Global Aquaculture Alliance's Best Aquaculture Practices (BAP) program, the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), and the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch program.

One of the most intriguing developments spotted at Fancy Food – and predicted by *Bon Appetit* magazine to be one of the five top food trends of 2018 – was high-end tinned seafoods, also known as conservas. It seems that, at certain bars and fine dining establishments around the United States, the notion of presenting exotic canned seafood products as an alternative to tapas and other tried-and-true starters has gained favor with urbanites, hipsters, and adventurous diners.

It is important to note that tinned seafoods are nothing new to Europeans, especially in Spain and Portugal, where leading brands including Matiz, La Brujula, Arroyabe, Ortiz, and Jose Gourmet are produced. In these countries, conservas are a way of life.

Meanwhile, in the United States, consumers

are still learning that great seafood can come in cans. Varieties including anchovies, sardines, octopus, mussels, squid, cockles, mackerel, and trout are being hand-selected and hand-packed with high quality oils, sauces, vegetables, vinegars, and herbs – as was observed this July in New York.

Highly-regarded U.S.-based restaurants are investing in this “tin-to-table” trend, with conservas rapidly becoming a quintessential bar food and an exciting new alternative to traditional charcuterie and cheese platters. For proof, try visiting Boston's Saltie Girl, Chicago's Fahlstrom's, or Seattle's JarrBar restaurants.

At Saltie Girl, owner Kathy Sidell and chef Kyle McClelland are leading the pack with an incredible assortment of specialty seafood sourced from all over the world, including 14 varieties of sardines, 13 varieties of tuna, as well as octopus, eel, mussels, squid, oysters, cod liver, cockles, razor clams, trout, and anchovies.

Fahlstrom's owner Glenn Fahlstrom finds conservas, from a European perspective, a workingman's approach to eating. In his restaurant, serving conservas is “a new way to eat that's not tapas. It's something entirely new.”

At JarrBar, self-proclaimed as “the best little bar in Seattle,” owner Bryan Jarr found inspiration from the intimate neighborhood bars that he visited in Spain and Portugal, where preserved seafoods were *de rigeur*. In Seattle,

his menu includes sardines, cockles, octopus, mackerel, trout, mussels, tuna, and cuttlefish, along with an intriguing variety of culinary creations.

U.S.-based importers and distributors including Fortune Fish, EcoFish, and Culinary Collective are already featuring a wide variety of conservas. At Fancy Food, EcoFish launched its own Freshé brand of tinned, ready-to-eat, tuna-based products from Portugal. Similarly, Fortune Fish and Culinary Collective featured well-regarded brands, including Ortiz and Matiz from Spain; Arroyabe from Chile; and Jose Gourmet from Portugal.

While it is unclear how many American producers are hand-packing high-quality seafood in tins, there is one standout that was featured on the menu at Saltie Girl – Ekone Oyster Co., operating from the shores of Willapa Bay, Washington, which offers five varieties of smoked oysters along with tuna, octopus, and mussels.

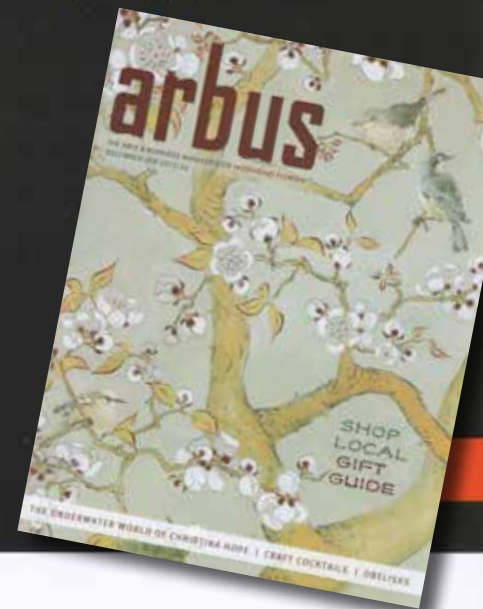
Knowing that patrons are actively seeking out new, exotic, and esoteric culinary experiences from the restaurants they frequent, the interest and excitement associated with conservas is no surprise. Considering that consumers, broadly speaking, are seeking higher-quality protein sources as well as convenience when preparing meals at home, finding high-quality tinned seafoods in home pantries shouldn't be too far off. ☺



ROLL UP FOR THE MAGICAL MYSTERY POUR

Discover a world of
delectable craft cocktails

By Jeffrey Spear



Assuming you've been of legal drinking age for at least a decade, and have enjoyed a cocktail or two on multiple occasions during this time, you will have noticed that the selection of spirits in both bars and restaurants has been getting considerably larger and more diverse. While some places specialize in small-batch artisanal spirits and take pride in their seemingly endless collections, others take a more culinary approach; maintaining a vast assortment of rare and esoteric liqueurs, many that have not been available, let alone popular, since before the 1920s.

Check out the labels. They've become exotic and fanciful; emblazoned with curious and frequently unpronounceable names such as Fernet-Branca, China-China Amer, Velvet Falernum, Carpano Antica, Amaro Averna, Cappelletti, Lillet, Crème Yvette, Aperol, and Suze.

Regardless of how the bar is stocked (Sidecar in San Marco

boasts nearly twenty-five different varieties of rum, four times as many whiskeys, and an impressive lineup of esoteric cordials, apéritifs and amari), there are increasing numbers of magical and mystical elixirs produced by local, regional and international distillers finding their way into town.

As with the popularity of celebrity chefs, culinary television shows and cookbooks of every possible orientation, the demand for innovation from world-class bartenders and engaging experiences from behind the bar is growing exponentially.

While many of these innovations were originally part of a craft cocktail movement that started in New York, South Beach, San Francisco and New Orleans, there are plenty of mixologists and culinary talents in Jacksonville who know how to shake, stir, blend, and pour cocktails that are entirely of their own making. These are the multi-talented individuals who have studied the history of cocktails; have a functional vocabulary and fluency with classic recipes; understand the distinctive differences between amari, liqueurs, cordials,

digestifs, and apéritifs; know how to formulate house-made syrups, fruit juices, shrubs and infusions; and know what it means to extend warm, enthusiastic, and genuine hospitality in pursuit of satisfying patrons' experiences on a daily basis and ensuring loyalty over time.

These days, restaurateurs and publicans have come to appreciate the extraordinary contributions that well-versed mixologists have to offer. In Jacksonville, if you are looking for something unusual, adventurous and altogether new in the way of adult beverages, you'll want to check out the offerings in the city's urban core. The journey begins in San Marco at Taverna, Sidecar, Grape & Grain Exchange, and Bistro Aix. From there, just across the river in Five Points, you'll want to imbibe at Blacksheep, admiring the view from its fabulous rooftop deck.

If the smell of salt air and the roar of the surf is more to your liking, head eastward towards the beach, stopping off at Moxie Kitchen + Cocktails at the Town Center along the way. From there, check out Flying Iguana in Neptune Beach or Marker 32 on the Intracoastal.

You'll also want to head southward into St. Augustine to inspect the locally distilled gin, rum and vodka from the St. Augustine Distillery and taste the innovative cocktails from its neighbor, the Ice Plant Bar.

While all of these places, and many more around town, have their own distinctive character and culinary appeal, there's a remarkable variety of exquisitely crafted cocktails that each has to offer.

What is most impressive, apart from the considerable number of esoteric spirits that line the barroom shelves, is the fact that so many key ingredients are sourced locally, hand crafted by small-batch producers, or made entirely from scratch in-house. While Angostura is still a perennial favorite, bar managers are maintaining an eclectic assortment of fruit and spice enhanced bitters from makers including Fee Brothers, Scrapy's and Bitter End to name a few. They are also making impressive infusions with a variety of fruits, vegetables, herbs and spices, squeezing their own fresh fruit juices, and formulating a dizzying array of house-made syrups and shrubs. *cont.*



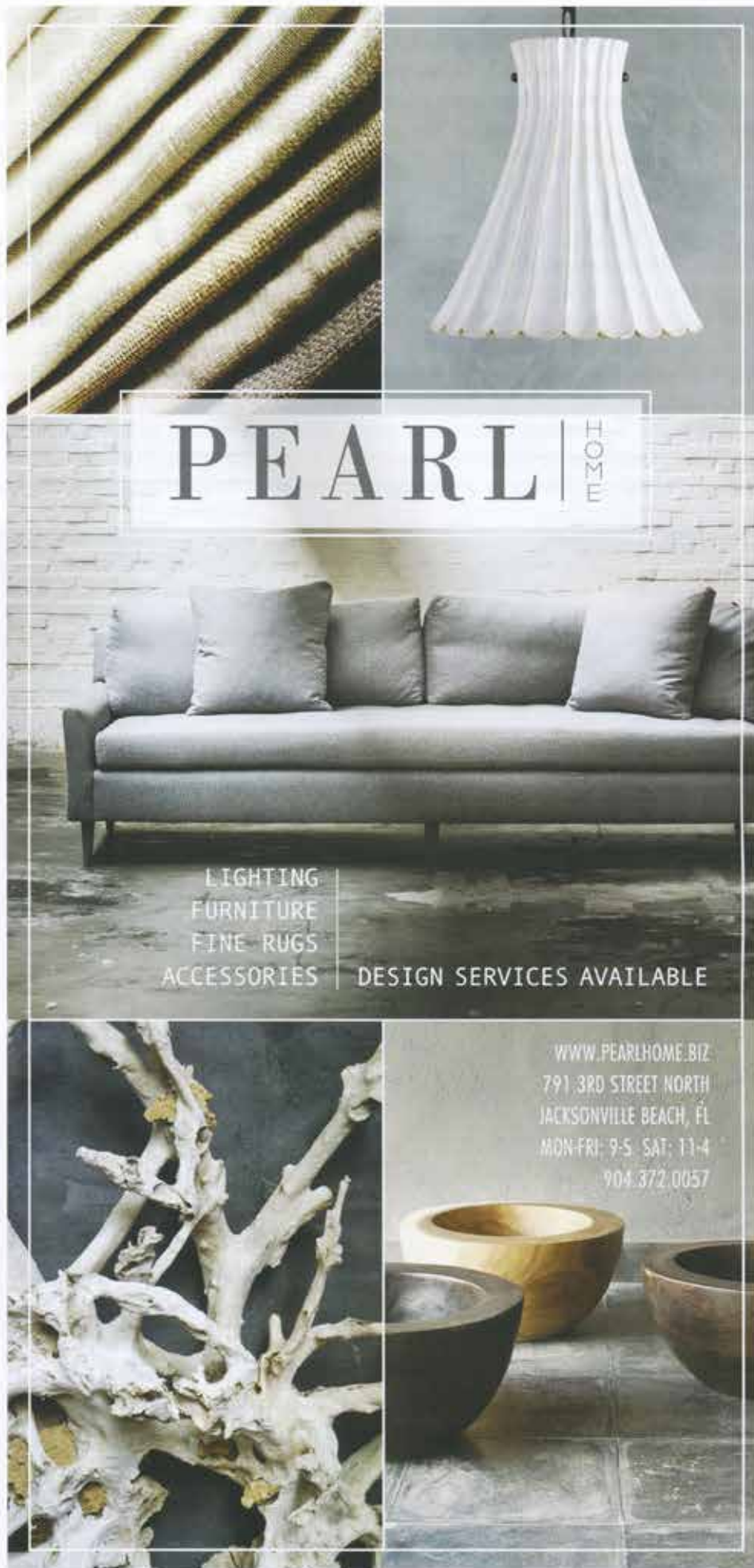
It's important to note that, just because a bar is stocked to the rafters with an endless variety of esoteric spirits and promotes a dizzying list of exotic flavors, it does not mean that their bar program is well conceived or that the bartenders are well informed. In some cases, less is more.

At Taverna, their culinary philosophy is "simple ingredients, simple flavors." This applies to the foods they prepare as well as the cocktails they craft. In many cases, what they achieve with a limited number of ingredients is quite impressive and extremely enjoyable. According to Kiley Wynne Efron, Taverna's Proprietor and Wine Director, "It doesn't matter whether it's from the kitchen or the bar. There's craft behind everything we do."

There is similar attention to detail, craft and product integrity at Moxie Kitchen + Cocktails. Under the watchful eye of Bar Manager Johnny Schaefer, they squeeze, press and formulate their own fruit juices, syrups and shrubs, all of which contribute to unique flavor profiles in both their non-alcoholic sodas as well as some of their more distinctive handcrafted cocktails. At Moxie Kitchen + Cocktails, they make their own strawberry, blueberry, orange and pear shrubs, all of which contribute a unique flavor profile to both their non-alcoholic sodas as well as some of their more distinctive handcrafted cocktails. Schaefer proudly states "Many of our patrons come for our uniquely modern approach to American food. Of course, we strive to deliver an equally unique drinking experience as well. Using locally sourced ingredients, preparing mixers in house and offering seasonally inspired cocktails is all part of that process."

The bar program at the Ice Plant Bar is equally impressive. Starting with their selection of locally made spirits, many of which are distilled next door at the St. Augustine distillery, the way they utilize ice (ask them to make an ice sphere for you), or their house-made cola (you cannot order a Rum & Coke), they take everything seriously.

Bar Manager Zach Lynch states, "For patrons who choose to sit at our bar



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and watch the action, they'll witness bartenders who are exceptionally well versed and quite passionate about their craft."

When it comes to the overall impact and enjoyment of craft cocktails, ice plays a critical role. Recognizing how much attention to detail is lavished upon recipe formulation and the base ingredients, it should be no surprise that the water that goes into ice making is carefully considered and always purified. Once frozen, the ice will be lovingly cubed or crushed and, in some cases, molded or chopped into perfect spheres.

For today's craft cocktail makers, the bottom line is controlling the appearance, texture and degree of dilution that the ice contributes to each and every drink. According to Michael Everett, bar manager at Bistro Aix, "We buy three-hundred-pound blocks of pure, crystal clear ice and cut them down into manageable blocks. Since we want to give our customers an engaging experience, we'll set a fifty-pound block of ice on the bar and cut it down into functional chunks. As soon as I break out the ice saw and start cutting, I have everyone's attention."

While it is well known that certain drinks should be served in specific vessels (a martini is typically served in stemware with a conical bowl), there are a number of bars and restaurants going to great lengths to enhance the pairing of beverage and

container.

Considering the resurgence of classic cocktails that were all the rage in the early 1900's, creative mixologists have also become cultural archeologists – digging around in antique shops and estate sales in search of historically relevant stemware, glassware, pitchers and decanters. By employing vintage tablewares, they enhance the authenticity of their cocktails and the overall experience at the bar. This is especially true at both Grape & Grain Exchange and Bistro Aix, where much of their glassware has been lovingly restored and is appreciated by an entirely new generation of cocktail enthusiasts.

The idea of engaging experiences does not stop with esoteric spirits, high-integrity ingredients, creative formulations and the right kinds of ice. Just take a look at the cocktail menus. With just one look, it is immediately apparent that someone has been having tremendous fun while developing names for all of these wonderful concoctions; running amok with questionable puns, quirky references and bits of cultural trivia.

At Grape & Grain Exchange, they serve a cocktail named 400 Rabbits, referring to the ancient Mexican story of Mayahuel, the Aztec goddess of agave and fertility. Other places have menus bearing creatively conceived names including Clockwork Orange, Hot Mama, Smokey and the Bandit, Wet Hot American Summer, Smooth Criminal, and Slow Boat to China. If you want them deciphered, bartenders are always armed with delightful stories that explain these amusing monikers.

While concept and craft are important, and the performance associated with the making of a cocktail is engaging, the test of a truly great drink demands attention from all of the senses.

Brian Binniker, spirits director at Taverna, agrees: "Craft cocktails are definitely a sensory adventure. At Taverna, we embrace a culinary concept where simplicity rules. At the bar, we employ simple ingredients to create sophisticated flavor experiences." Their house daiquiri, the Lil' Rhody, is one such example; made with nothing more than good rum (Thomas Tew), freshly squeezed lime juice and simple syrup.

MARKER 32



Of course, they also offer the spicy and considerably more complex Pancho's Revenge (recipe accompanies this article) that features St. Augustine Vodka infused with Serrano chili, Aperol, Carpano Bianco, Santa Teresa Valencia Orange Liqueur and a few other not so esoteric ingredients.

The bottom line is the delightful sensory adventure that historically inspired, creative and innovative cocktails represent. It's the feel of the glass in your hand, the shapes and colors that stimulate your eyes, and the aromas that tickle your nose. It's the moment when that artfully distilled vodka, gin, whiskey or rum, perfectly paired with liqueurs, aromatics, herbs and/or fruit, crosses your lips, dazzles your tongue and delivers that crescendo of stimulation that is the hallmark of a well-crafted cocktail.



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